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ABSTRACT

A survey of the 20 most populous states concerning their secondary school provision of foreign languages for business is reported. State foreign language supervisors were interviewed for information on state policy or planning for the inclusion of foreign language for business or applied language studies, for information about specific programs or courses, and for predictions about the future of foreign languages for business in the state in the next five years. Survey results show that few states offer this curriculum at the secondary level, and only Virginia and Louisiana had specific examples of pilot programs or existing curricula. In many cases, the state supervisors did not know whether any such courses were offered anywhere in the state. Only Wisconsin and Florida have state curriculum guides for the local school districts. Several officials in states without specific policies were supportive of the idea, but most were pessimistic about advances in state policy favoring foreign languages for business because of other state mandates, the more urgent need to boost support for basic language teaching, lack of time in the school schedule, and lack of trained teachers and appropriate materials. (MSE)

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FOREIGN LANGUAGES FOR BUSINESS IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM

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FOREIGN LANGUAGES FOR BUSINESS IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM

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I. Introduction

A professor of linguistics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who researched the etimologies of words of Arabic origin for the Oxford English Dictionary once advised his students, "the time you spend looking for an idea that works is not so important as the time you have spent looking at and discarding ideas that don't work. That time and effort is not lost, rather it is well spent since you have discovered what is NOT right." His advice is especially appropriate as an introduction to this study of foreign languages for business in the secondary school curriculum, where considerable time was spent in discovering what was not there.

II. Process

The purpose of the research was to investigate the extent to which foreign languages for business had entered the secondary level foreign language curriculum of the twenty most populous states. The twenty states with the highest population were chosen for the sample since it was assumed that these states would be more likely to have foreign language for business programs in their urban high schools than the less populated, more predominantly rural states. The author devised a detailed questionnaire that examined state policy toward foreign languages for business, description of courses offered, rationale for course development, attitudes toward applied language studies, and possibility for future proliferation of courses. The

questionnaire was intended to be administered to state foreign language supervisors via telephone interviews.

It soon became clear that the questionnaire would have to be revised substantially due to the absence of foreign language for business units, modules, courses, programs in the state curriculum. For this reason, the questionnaire was modified to three basic questions:

1. Does <u>your</u> <u>state</u> have a statewide policy or plan that advocates the inclusion of foreign language for business or applied language studies in the secondary school curriculum? If yes, please explain.

2. Do you know of any teachers, high schools or school districts that teach foreign language for business as part of a course unit, as a separate course, or a special program? If so, please describe.

3 Do you foresee that your state will move to encourage the study of foreign languages for business over the next five years? In your opinion, are more such courses likely to appear at the secondary level?

The telephone calls to the foreign language supervisors of the twenty states were made over a two week period. The response rate to the survey was ninety percent, with responses from eighteen out of twenty states. Several of the supervisors referred the author to the foreign language program specialists in local school districts, school administrators, conference directors, and foreign language association officers for further information. The author appreciated the references, but was

unable to contact all of the people reccmmended within the time constraints of the two week period of the survey

III Results

As the summary of the survey results indicates, few states offer foreign languages for business at the secondary level Only Virginia and Louisiana had specific examples of pilot programs and high schools with business Spanish and business French courses in the curriculum. In Fairfax County, Virginia for example, the local foreign language supervisors are planning a pilot program for next year in several schools for students who have at least two years of language study. The program is entitled "Spanish for the Business World" and will consist of two contact hours per day: one hour of Spanish language instruction and one hour of business content. Also in Virginia, in Chesterfield County, an honors program exists that offers practical experience in foreign languages. In this program, students have mentorships with companies, and engage in such activities as conducting tours for foreign visitors in the target language through the Phillip Morris plant or through local museums.

The Louisiana programs are located in two international high schools- Caddo Parish School in Shreveport and Orleans Parish School in New Orleans. The optional foreign language program provides a three hour block of French per day, including one hour of basic language instruction, one hour of history, and one hour of economics/business. The program has a prerequisite of two to three years of French. For four years the programs have been in operation. During the first two years, the French consulate in

New Orleans made available ten to twelve scholarships to students for study abroad in France for one month in the summer.

In some cases, the foreign language supervisors were not certain whether any high schools in their states offered such courses or included such units in the curriculum. In Tennessee, Missouri, Georgia, and Florida the supervisors thought that such courses might exist in isolated instances in their states. The majority of respondents knew of no such units, courses or programs in their states. Many said that they really had no data on course offerings around the state and no means of knowing what courses individual school districts or high schools or teachers offered. The Massachusetts supervisor indicated that his state had prepared a detailed curriculum survey for the purpose of gathering information about specific foreign language offerings throughout the state, but, the questionnaires had never been sent since the state had not approved funding for the project. Apparently many states allocate curricular decisions to the local school district. In New Jersey, no central planning or coordinating office exists for foreign languages in the State Department of Education. The state coordinator for bilingual education answered the survey questions.

At times during the survey, it seemed as if more information regarding the existence of foreign languages for business in the secondary curriculum could be obtained from individual school districts, especially those with magnet schools for foreign language instruction, international high schools, or large language minority populations. It seems difficult to believe

that the states of California and New York have no unique foreign language for business programs in all of their high schools, yet to the knowledge of the supervisors of those states, no such programs exist.

The issue of career education was raised by several supervisors as a possible avenue for business foreign language programs. Both the New York and California supervisors mentioned that these programs, popular several years ago, might still be part of the curriculum in some French and Spanish classes in high schools around their states. Apparently all content area classes were required to have a career education component in the past but with the passing of the trend, few high schools still offer the units in the content areas.

Regarding state policy toward foreign languages for business, only Wisconsin and Florida have state curriculum guides for the local school districts. The course "Spanish for Business" is listed in Florida's curriculum framework and in the state course code directory. To be qualified to teach the course, the instructor must hold certification in Spanish. The course content includes writing business correspondence in Spanish and the translation of business documents. The level of the course is Spanish 3 or above. However, although the course was taught two years ago at Hillsboro High School in Tampa, the supervisor is not certain whether the course is being taught there in the current academic year.

The foreign language curriculum guide of Wisconsin, which was just published in March, 1986, took two years to develop under the guidance of curriculum experts such as Constance Knop

The guide takes the innovative functional- notional approach rather than the traditional grammatical approach to curriculum development. It details communicative functions of language and levels of proficiency recommended for the various courses in secondary school. The guide mentions business applications of foreign languages and refers to business etiquette and social work situations. Other states have expressed a desire to model their curriculum on Wisconsin's guide. However, as far as the supervisor knew, no high schools in Wisconsin were offering business language courses.

Several supervisors of states without a written policy advocating foreign language for business studies seemed supportive of the idea. In North Carolina, a Report of the Foreign Language Curriculum Study Committee was submitted to the North Carolina Board of Education in October, 1983 that recommended "the creation of new courses in the foreign language curriculum for non-traditional language students and the development of a plan for linking foreign languages and employment opportunities." Tennessee is currently working on a statewide curriculum, and several legislators are openly in favor of strong foreign language programs. The state also has a recent history of trying to attract more international businesses. Massachusetts will hold a symposium of expert consultants in June in the form of workshops and study sessions in order to formulate foreign language, ESL and bilingual education policy recommendations to present to the Board of Education in the fall. One of the themes for the symposium will be "Languages for the

World of Work".

Regarding the future of foreign languages for business in the secondary school curriculum, most supervisors felt that very little would change regarding state policy toward such courses in the next five years. They also believed, on the whole, that the presence of business foreign languages would not increase significantly in the near future. Not one supervisor gave a resoundingly positive outlook for the future of business languages. They gave a variety of reasons to explain their pessimistic outlook, as well as to rationalize why business foreign languages were not taught more extensively at the secondary level.

The most frequently cited reason for the lack of interest in business languages was that the foreign language programs were too busy working on other state mandates, such as new foreign language requirements for freshmen entering state colleges and universities, push for communicative competence and proficiciency development, content oriented approach to teaching foreign languages, and the move to a functional curriculum. Among some of the comments echoed repeatedly in the interviews were: we have enough to do keeping up with the new state mandates of two to three years of foreign languages that is required for entrance into state colleges and universities. Our programs are understaffed and overpopulated. We are still fighting the battle to have the basic foreign languages taught. It is hard enough to promote the programs that we have. Change is the hardest thing to effect. We do not want to urge too many changes at once on our school districts or teachers.

Other reasons offered by the supervisors for not including business languages were that students don't have enough time to learn the basics in secondary school, much less learn specialized business language. Some supervisors noted that high school students hadn't decided yet on a career, and so foreign languages for business courses or units were inappropriate at this level. They felt the community colleges and universities could better meet students' needs for this type of course.

Some respondents observed that few teachers were trained to teach both foreign languages and business, while others commented that materials were difficult to find.

The few supervisors who knew of courses in business foreign languages, and associated school district supervisors were asked why the courses had been developed. In Fairfax County, Virginia, the business Spanish pilot program was developed to meet the needs of a large Hispanic population, with the purpose of preparing students for the job market. In Louisiana, parental support and a substantial French speaking population were reasons why the business foreign language programs had been developed in two international high schools. The Massachusetts supervisor stated that foreign language skills are important in today's world of industry. He believes that foreign language proficiency is no longer just a luxury or an aesthetic advantage, rather it is useful and practical for the student.

IV. Conclusions

Many supervisors apologized for the lack of positive information available about the presence of foreign languages for

business in the secondary school curriculum However, as the professor of linguistics from Chapel Hill would have told them, they had been most helpful by showing what is not there. Certainly, the state supervisors cannot know what units or even courses are included in every high school in their states Yet it seems reasonable to assume that they better than any single person would have a feel for the statewide curricular offerings Undoubtedly a more thorough and precise study could be made through a study of local school districts in urban areas with high concentrations of language minority students, magnet schools that emphasize foreign languages, and international high schools. Apparently the trend toward applied language studies is concentrated in higher education and has not spread to secondary school. The results from this study do not indicate a likelihood for growth of the field at the secondary level over the next five years.